



22 February 2016

Parliamentary Briefing on Active Travel Proposal for Scottish Budget 16/17

In this briefing, we urge the Government to adopt a proposal¹ initiated by Spokes calling for 1% of the £820m trunk roads budget line in the draft 16/17 budget to be transferred to active travel.

We are delighted that this proposal has been supported in a letter² to the Finance Secretary from the Cross Party Cycling Group, signed by its co-conveners from the SNP, Labour and Green parties.

Background and rationale

The Scottish Government has a “vision” that 10% of all journeys will be by bike in 2020 – also termed a “commitment” in the Infrastructure Investment Plan which accompanies the Budget. This ambition is cemented into government policy documents on climate change and on public health and will also contribute to reduced toxic air pollution, reduced congestion, and to improving local shopping, school and residential environments.

The latest Scottish Household Survey data, for 2014, shows 1.4% of all trips being made by bike, and 2.6% of commuter trips – far below the above 10% aim, but nonetheless the best figures for many years.

This small but significant improvement in cycling levels reflects a momentum which is starting to build up in provision, expertise and ambition by local authorities, and which it is vital to maintain and strengthen in the coming year. This momentum is evidenced in 25 superb bids received by Sustrans from local authorities for the new Community Links Plus competition recently announced by the Transport Minister - but which is expected to fund only one or two schemes.

The 16/17 draft budget allocates £39m to active travel – very similar to last year's total, but less than 2% of total transport spending, and giving no real hope of approaching the 2020 cycle use ambition. Moreover, we are very concerned at two aspects which are likely to cut cycling investment in the great majority of local authorities, and therefore set back the current momentum.

1. The Community Links Plus competition is to be funded by taking money from the existing basic Community Links scheme. Thus whilst the winning one or two local authorities will gain substantial funding, the 30 or so other councils will have a much smaller pot to which to bid.
2. Within the £39m active travel total, CWSS, the most basic cycle funding, allocated to councils on a per-head basis, is to be cut from £8.0m to £5.9m. CWSS is widely used by local authorities to obtain 50/50 match funds from outside sources and as such this cut is effectively doubled.

1 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/1512-Spokes-SP-ICI-15-16-Budget-submission.pdf>

2 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/1602-Letter-to-Deputy-First-Minister-20160208-re-budget-1-idea.pdf>

In contrast, the draft budget allocates £820m to trunk roads.

A transfer of just 1% of this £820m trunk roads budget would overcome both the above concerns, and fund one or two more of the Community Links Plus bids, maintaining and strengthening the growth in local authority cycling provision, expertise and ambition.

A shift from trunk roads to cycling, even of this small percentage, would also help Scotland towards its commitments on cleaner air, healthier people and tackling climate change:.

1) **Cleaner air:** Air pollution causes at least 2000 early deaths in Scotland each year and many areas continue to have illegal levels of air pollution.³ It costs Scotland around £1.1 billion every year in costs to the NHS and days lost at work.⁴ Following a Supreme Court Order the UK and Scottish Governments are under an obligation to comply with the European Air Quality Directive as soon as possible. A meaningful modal shift to active travel will go a long way in improving air quality in our towns and cities and ensuring that Scotland complies with its duty to meet European law and protect human health.

2) **Healthier people:** Physical inactivity costs the NHS in Scotland £94 million annually.⁵ If people are able to build walking and cycling into their daily lives by having safe options to commute to work and school by active travel, this will be an easy way to get the nation active.

3) **Tackling climate change:** the transport sector accounts for a growing percentage of Scotland's climate change emissions – already 24%. If the Scottish Government is to meet its targets in the Climate Change Act it must reduce traffic congestion and tackle emissions from the transport sector by making a genuine push to encourage active travel.

Finally, and for the avoidance of doubt, our proposal relates only to the 16/17 budget. For future budgets, and for Holyrood manifestos, we strongly support the call, initiated by the Association of Directors of Public Health and endorsed by many Scottish organisations, for 10% of transport budgets to be used for active travel.

³ Public Health England, "Estimating Local Mortality Burdens associated with Particulate Air Pollution" (2014)

⁴ Extrapolated from UK-wide figure of £16bn, in Defra, "Impact pathway guidance for valuing changes in air quality" (2013)

⁵ Sustrans, "Physical activity and health - facts and figures"